

ГЛАСОВИ И СЛИКЕ

Облици комуникације на средњовековном Балкану (IV–XVI век)



ГЛАСОВИ И СЛИКЕ

ОБЛИЦИ КОМУНИКАЦИЈЕ
НА СРЕДЊОВЕКОВНОМ БАЛКАНУ
(IV–XVI ВЕК)

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(4TH TO 16TH CENTURIES)

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ON THE TRANSPOSITION OF *TETRAPYLA* INTO THE STRUCTURAL AND SYMBOLIC CORES OF BYZANTINE CHURCHES*

In Roman imperial cities, monumental urban structures situated at the intersection of major thoroughfares within the street grid, the so-called *tetrapyla* (literally, four gates; also known as *quadrifrons*, four-way arches) and *tetrakionia* (a sub-type of *tetrapylon* made of four freestanding columns), were imperial and ceremonial markers of principal focal points in the city and symbolic cosmic axes that connected the earthly and heavenly realms.¹ Several still-standing *tetrapyla* reveal the monumentality of these colossal structures. For example, the second-century *tetrapylon* at the north *decumanus* in Jerash, Jordan was originally the pivotal structure in the city (fig. 1). Formed on a square plan, this structure is composed of four massive masonry arches standing on four corner piers that rest on an L-shaped footing. An immense

* Many thanks are due to several individuals. Ljubomir Milanović invited me to participate in the project *Voices and Images* that examines a variety of communication modes during the medieval period. I am additionally grateful for his constructive suggestions while working on the paper. For comments based on subtle understanding of architecture as both a specific creative discipline and a rhetorical tool in its own right I am also thankful to Marina Mihaljević, Ida Sinkević, and Cecilia Olovsson. Cynthia McCall Torres, Debanjana Chatterjee, Paolo Orlando and Christopher Perez helped with architectural drawings and three-dimensional models. Valerie Dennis copyedited the text. As always, my family members supported my work.

1 Downey, References to Inscriptions, 55–72; Downey, Architectural Significance, 194–211; Thiel, Tetrakionia, 299–326; Milojević, Forming and Transforming, 247–262; Bogdanović, Tetrapylon; Bogdanović, Framing, 243–251. McCormick, Eternal Victory, 214–216, 297–327, enlists the triumphant imperial stations in Constantinople, and discusses Visigothic emulation and symbolic appropriation of Byzantine imperial ceremonies and stations. Dey, Afterlife, 35–50, 90–126, additionally analyzes porticated streets as a kind of ceremonial armature of late antique and early Christian cities, recurrently emphasizing their crossing marked by *tetrapyla*.



Figure 1. North Tetrapylon, Jerash, 2nd century

cornice zone is articulated by alternating circular and triangular gables that rest on two columns and additionally frame the central arches. The delicately designed third-century *terapylon* in Aphrodisias, Turkey rests on a square platform carrying in each corner a tight grouping of four elegant columns, crowned by considerably-sized cornices that support broken pediments (fig. 2). Originally, *tetrapyla* were crowned by massive roofs, which could have been either pyramidal or domical in shape (fig. 3). In the Mediterranean, these mighty structures were



Figure 2. Terapylon, Aphrodisias, Turkey, 3rd century

often associated with ceremonies of imperial triumph and proclamations, thereby symbolizing the presence of the Roman Emperor even

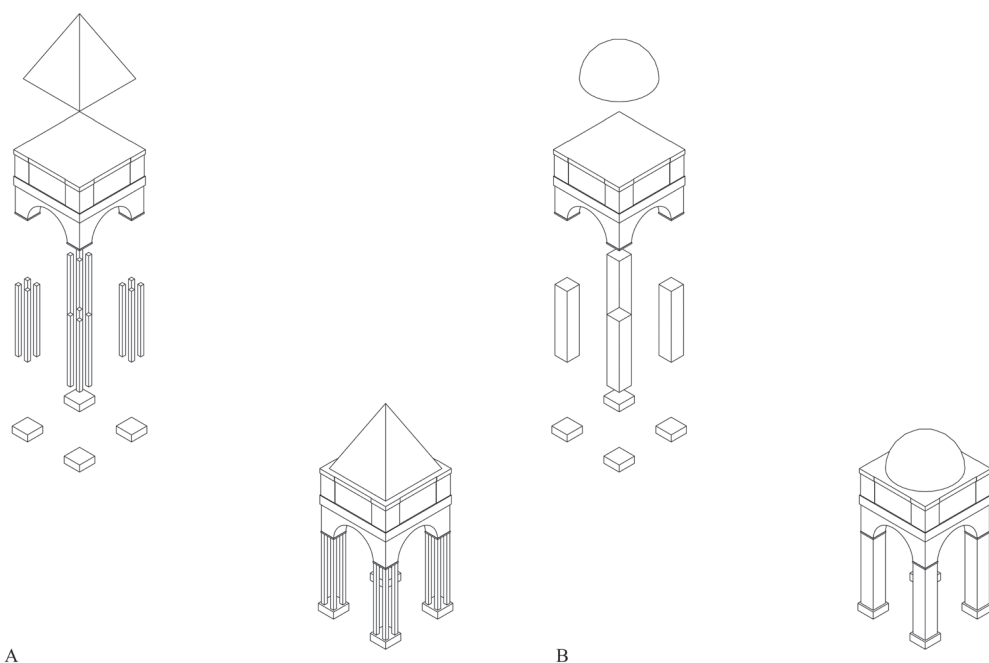


Figure 3. Diagrammatic drawing of ancient tetrapyla: a) with pyramidal roof; b) with a dome

in his absence.² Additionally, the *tetrapylon* structural module also could have been used for tombs of the privileged, exemplified by the canopied tomb in Dana, Syria—an object that can be dated tentatively to the third century (fig. 4).³ The tomb in Dana shows all essential elements of a typical *tetrapylon* structure: a raised square-based platform, four columns in the corners of this prismatic platform, columns connected horizontally by a massive middle-zone cornice, and here crowned by a pyramidal roof.

² Among texts that highlight the pervasive cosmic and imperial symbolism of domed structures in the Mediterranean region is *Olovsdotter*, *Architecture and the Spheres of the Universe*, 137–177, esp. 147–150, with abundant bibliographical references to earlier scholarship on the topic. On the symbolic meaning of the Severan, third-century *quadrifrons* in Leptis Magna, Libya, see *Lehmann*, *Dome of Heaven*, 1–27. On the historical record of the display of the official imperial proclamations at the Tetrapylon of the Elephants in Antioch during the reign of Emperor Julian (r. 361–363) as well as a graffito near the *tetrapylon* at Aphrodisias that shows a figure in an action of acclamation, see also *Dey*, *Afterlife*, 94, 99.

³ *Kader*, *Propylon und Bogentor*; *Colvin*, *Architecture and the After-Life*, 74–78.



Figure 4. Late Roman tomb in Dana, Syria, 3rd century (?)

In late antique and early Christian cities, principal structures, including churches were recurrently built immediately adjacent or very close to *tetrapyla*.⁴ Such complexes defined the urban topography while condensing the ceremonial imperial and religious processions and the symbolic essence of the city within their architecture.⁵ For the Byzantines, indeed, *tetrapyla* remained recognizable and potent markers of specially designated honorific and civic places, which, as this paper aims to demonstrate, were occasionally effectively incorporated into the architectural design of some Christian sites, regardless of what we today tend to recognize as being their primary function—a memorial church or urban basilica. Several specific solutions from the fourth-century Kaoussié (Qausîyeh) Church of St. Babylas, the fifth-century Monastery of St. Simeon Stylites the Elder, the fifth-century Church of St. John at Ephesus (which was remodeled in the sixth century), the late sixth- or early seventh-century remodeling of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki, as well as the adaptive re-use of *tetrapyla* in Constantinople during medieval times provide examples for the investigation of the role of these structures in architectural design of a variety of churches in the eastern Mediterranean. Rather than providing a comprehensive overview of the archeological evidence for the *tetrapyla*-inspired church design, often examined two-dimensionally from the perspective of their floor plans,⁶ these examples allow for a broader discussion on the multiplicity of the three-dimensional physical articulation of *tetrapyla* and their role in the creation of church spaces. Taking advantage of this broader perspective, the following analysis highlights the diverse design processes

4 *Torp*, *Entrée*, 268–272; *Dey*, *Afterlife*, 35–50, 90–126.

5 See also, *McCormick*, *Eternal Victory*, 388–396, esp. 391–392.

6 See, for example, seminal text by *Krautheimer*, *Iconography of Medieval Architecture*, 1–33, and the assessment of his method in *Carver McCurrach*, “Renovatio” Reconsidered, 41–69. For an alternative approach that elucidates effective combination of archaeological and architectural understanding of churches essentially based on a *tetrapylon* core, see *Johnson*, *Byzantine Churches of Sardinia*, esp. chapter 3 “The Church of San Saturnino, Cagliari,” 27–38 and chapter 7 “Excursus: The Cross Plan Church in Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture,” 87–100. These sources highlight the incorporation of *martyria*, or memorial structures, into cruciform church design with a dome or a tower placed at the crossing.

based on the concepts of modularity and the transposition of *tetrapyla* into the structural and symbolic cores of Byzantine churches, and further reveals the dynamics of Byzantine architecture understood both as a process and an actual structure.⁷

*

Church of St. Babylas in Antioch-Kaoussié (Qausîyeh)

Among the earliest and most acknowledged examples of the church design based on the principles of the *tetrapyla* is the fourth-century church in Antioch-Kaoussié (Qausîyeh), Syria (now Turkey), associated with St. Babylas, a third-century bishop and martyr from Antioch (d. ca. 250).⁸ The eponymous church in architectural terms emerged from a *quadrifrons* structure. This famous structure marked the vital passage along the River Orontes to Antioch, the major metropolis in antiquity and early Christian times. The four L-shaped footings for the piers at the crossing of the church of St. Babylas, approximately 3m by 3m in plan, point to a kind of a massive *quadrifrons* of some 15m in span (fig. 5).⁹ The central focus of this memorial site contained the saintly tomb in the north-west corner of the central chamber,¹⁰ architecturally framed by a massive four-columned struc-

7 In architectural design, modularity is related to the construction of an object by joining standardized units (modules) to form larger compositions (structures). The transposition relates to the re-arrangement, re-ordering, or reversing the placement of units (modules), while at the same time transposing, i.e. exchanging their symbolic meaning, thereby also revealing the potency of architecture as a communication tool in wider cultural contexts. In this paper, the basic architectural module we analyze is the four-columned structure known as *tetrapylon*, with its associated symbolic meanings. Such an architectural analysis is independent, though not always mutually exclusive, from archeological study of specific construction campaigns.

8 Downey, References to Inscriptions, 55–72. On the dating of the church to the late 370s and before 387 based on the surviving floor mosaics and inscriptions, see Lassus, Église cruciforme Antioche-Kaoussié, 5–44; Campbell, Mosaics of Antioch, 43–47.

9 Krautheimer (with Ćurčić), Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture, 75; Mango, Byzantine Architecture, 51; Bogdanović, Framing, 246.

10 Lassus, Église cruciforme Antioche-Kaoussié, 5–44.

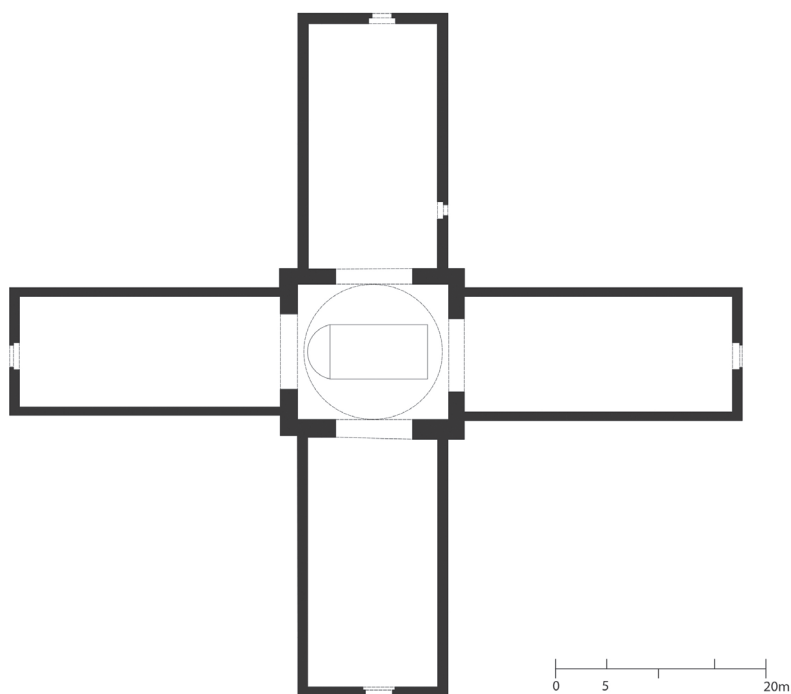


Figure 5. Martyrium Church of St. Babylas in Antioch- Kaoussié, Syria (now Turkey), 4th century

ture, possibly domed. In form and funerary meaning, the configuration of the structure also resembles the tomb in Dana. However, with its massive scale, the Shrine of St. Babylas is an architecturally closer response to monumental *tetrapyla*, which marked significant locations along civic routs and conveyed their victorious and honorific meanings, highlighting the articulation of the Christian belief that through his martyrdom St. Babylas received the greatest honors and eternal life.

St. Babylas is known as the first saint on record to have had his bodily remains moved from the original tomb to this shrine provided especially for religious purposes; a practice that later became known as the “translation of relics.”¹¹ The alignment of the imperial procession with the translation of relics has already been emphasized in scholarship. The imperial authority of the emperors and empresses is associated with the role of a triumphator, while in the similarly articulated

¹¹ *John Chrysostom*, *Cult of Saints*, 40.

religious procession, the body of the saint becomes the palladium of Christian victory over death. This phenomenon is nicely elaborated in the analysis of the so-called Trier Ivory that visually showcases the translation of the relics with the depiction of the emperor and empress participating in the procession.¹² Hence, it may be argued that the ceremonial act of the translation of the holy relics from the main cemetery in Antioch and their deposition within the massive *tetrapylon*-like shrine evoked the long-established ceremonies of imperial presence and triumph. The structure accommodated the flowing crowds of pilgrims, who would come to Antioch and gather at the St. Babylas church to venerate and honor the martyr and his profession of Christianity.

In addition to the tomb of St. Babylas, the immense *martyrium*-shrine acquired other subaltern tombs. Already being plundered at the time of archeological excavations in the 1930s, the precise dating and original articulation of these tombs are still spurring scholarly controversies among archaeologists who disagree about whether they were martyrs' tombs, burials of St. Babylas' successors or of the common people buried close to St. Babylas following the so-called *ad sanctum* practices, as well as whether these tombs were originally visible and then covered by floor mosaics or visually indistinguishable from the very start.¹³ In the recent overview of the tomb locations recovered on the site, nineteen within the perimeter of the church and one just outside the church walls, Wendy Mayer highlighted once again how the tomb set in the north-west corner of the central chamber was most prominent.¹⁴ Marked by the double-stone sarcophagus, this tomb contained either the bodies of St. Babylas and Antiochene bishop Meletius (360-381), who built the church in honor of St. Babylas, or the bodies of St. Babylas and three children martyred at the same time as the saint. This internal structure was distinct from the others in its physical form, by being unique in size and made of stone, with its lid most likely vis-

12 *Milanović*, Delivering the Sacred, 107–123, esp. 115; *Holum – Vikan*, Trier Ivory, 113–133; *MacCormack*, Art and Ceremony, 55–56.

13 *Mayer*, Late Antique Church at Qausiyyeh, 161–77, with references to the controversies among archeologists regarding the Church of St. Babylas.

14 *Ibid.*

ible within the church space. Leveled with or slightly raised from the mosaic pavement, perhaps it was additionally marked by a reliquary chest. All together such an installation allowed for the articulation of the micro-locale of this tomb as a shrine. The major architectural argument about the recognition of the special tomb in the north-western corner, near to the U-shaped bema centrally placed in the main chamber, remains critical for understanding the overall church design and the key role of the central, *tetrapylon*-like spatial unit. A church altar was added at some point, and the entire core was additionally framed by an enormous cruciform building.

The cruciform shape of the entire structure of St. Babylas church with its *tetrapylon* as a pivotal element became a powerful Christian statement in its own right. At some later point a baptistery and sacristy were also added. Hence, even if archeological evidence does not allow for more detailed analysis of the complex dedicated to St. Babylas, it remains the first historically recorded and fully architecturally defined and functional Christian site, which developed from the concept of the *tetrapylon* as both a type of a tomb and a public memorial of great importance.¹⁵

Church of St. Simeon Stylites the Elder near Aleppo

The Monastery of St. Simeon Stylites the Elder (ca. 389-459), built on top of the barren Mount Simeon (Mt. Nebo) near Aleppo, Syria, was possibly constructed under the auspices of Emperor Zeno (471-91).¹⁶ The principal structure of this enormous complex is the Church of St. Simeon Stylites, which in square footage almost equaled Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. In its cruciform shape, the Church of St.

¹⁵ Even if architecture is not discussed in sufficient detail, an elaborate, alternative analysis of the public role of the Church of St. Babylas examined against the religious controversies about pagan and Christian traditions and framed by imperial policies is also provided in *Shepardson*, *Controlling Contested Places*, 58–91.

¹⁶ *Mango*, *Byzantine Architecture*, 48–51. The complex was definitely an imperial donation most likely built sometime around the 470s, even if there is no definite and direct proof that it was built by Emperor Zeno himself. This controversy is nicely summarized by *Johnson*, *San Vitale*, 78–83, esp. 79.

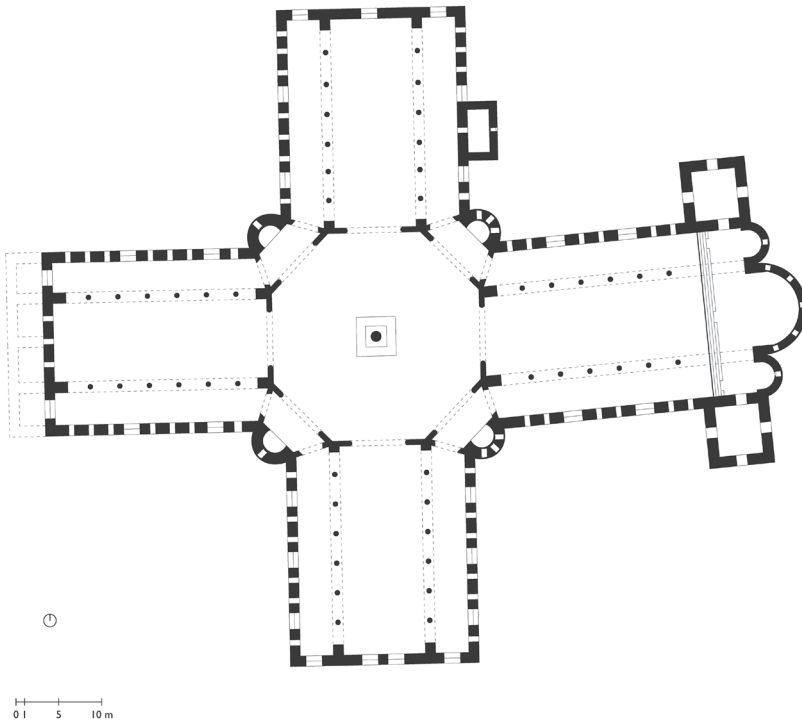


Figure 6. Church of St. Simeon Stylites the Elder, near Aleppo, Syria, 5th century

Simeon strongly resembles the architectural solution of the *martyrium* church of St. Babylas. Here, at the Church of St. Simeon, the four arms of the cross are actually four massive basilicas added to flank the central core and cardinal focus of the entire site (fig. 6).¹⁷ At the crossing of the Church of St. Simeon, the area some 25 meters in span is articulated by an arcuated masonry octagon inscribed in a square with exedra-like rounded corners. The corner exedras unite this cruciform complex with the central core. Undoubtedly, the eastern basilica with a three-partite sanctuary functioned as a church. The central core encloses the ancient pillar that functioned as a kind of a shrine-memorial architecturally framed by a central core. Now only partially preserved,

¹⁷ By comparing research by Sodini and Biscop with that by Ecohard, who studied the site from the archeological perspective, architectural historian *Johnson*, *San Vitale*, 78–83, agrees with Sodini and Biscop that the church was built in a single construction campaign. Be that as it may, the central core is a pivotal and essential element of the entire architectural design.



Figure 7. Remnants of a column on top of which St. Simeon Stylite stood, Church of St. Simeon Stylites the Elder, near Aleppo, Syria, 4th-5th century

this column originally represented the momentous architectural element and the very spot that instigated the construction of the entire monastic complex (fig. 7). On top of this column, the famous hermit St. Simeon Stylite, “endeavouring to realize in the flesh the existence of the heavenly hosts, lift[ed] himself above the concerns of earth, and ... placed [himself] between earth and heaven.”¹⁸ According to the hagiographer Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus, and recorded by Evagrius Scholasticus, St. Simeon set a tiny platform of some two cubits (less than a meter) in perimeter, on top of this originally 40 cubit (approximately 18 meters) tall column and spent most of his ascetic life, or 37 years, there.¹⁹

A powerful vertical axis comprised of the column and the standing figure of the saint searching, in his singular position and mode of

¹⁸ *Evagrius Scholasticus*, *Historia ecclesiastica*, Book I, chapter XIII.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

life, for communion with God²⁰ provided an ingenious architectural solution.²¹ Instead of articulating the saintly tomb-shrine as in the Church of St. Babylas, here the central, massive core articulated as the focal point the column upon which St. Simeon lived. Simultaneously, the vertical void at the *tetrapylon*-like crossing of an extremely large church defies materiality and emphasizes the mystical union of St. Simeon the Stylite with God somewhere between the earthly and heavenly realms. The vertical void, therefore, becomes a living church, with St. Simeon on top of his column evoking a living sanctuary of this “vertical church.” As explained by the hagiographer Theodoret, St. Simeon hovering on the top of his column had been “placed between earth and heaven, he holds communion with God, and unites with the angels in praising him; from earth, offering his intercessions on behalf of men, and from heaven, drawing down upon them the divine favour.”²²

While there are suggestions that the central core of the Church of St. Simeon Stylite was originally roofed at some point, possibly even domed, the sheer span of more than 25 meters, the open design of the construction that is structurally relatively weak for holding heavy masonry roof, the paradigmatic use of the *tetrapylon*, and finally, the hagiographical references from the *Life of St. Simeon* by Theodoret, which Evagrius Scholasticus recorded in the sixth century,²³ all make it unlikely that a roof was part of the original structure. For most of its existence, the central structure was definitely not domed.²⁴ From the archi-

20 Ibid.

21 As a reminder, the imperial stations in Constantinople included references to porticated structures and triumphal arches, some of them actually *tetrapyla*, as well as triumphal columns with sculptures of the Byzantine emperors. *McCormick*, *Eternal Victory*, 214–216.

22 *Evagrius Scholasticus*, *Historia ecclesiastica*, Book 1, chapter XIII.

23 “The ascent of the mountain is as much as twenty stadia. The temple is constructed in the form of a cross, adorned with colonnades on the four sides. Beside the colonnades are arranged handsome columns of polished stone, sustaining a roof of considerable elevation; while the centre is occupied by an unroofed court of the most excellent workmanship, where stands the pillar, of forty-cubits, on which the incarnate angel [St. Simeon] upon earth spent his heavenly life.” *Evagrius Scholasticus*, *Historia ecclesiastica*, Book 1, chapter XIV.

24 *Johnson*, *San Vitale*, 78–83, reviews the extensive scholarly controversy regarding whether or not the central core was covered. Even if the timber roof with ter-

tectural and symbolic point of view, a dome would not be necessary. The “living” column of St. Simeon the Stylite, set in a vast open court as a kind of a victorious, triumphal column, connected the earthly and heavenly realms. The column reversed the idea of the massive enclosing *tetrapylon* structure by emphasizing the vertical and its connection to the holy and the divine, rather than the horizontal expanse of the structure. This architectural process additionally highlighted the symbolic meanings of triumphal structures that emphasize presence even in the material absence. Evagrius records how the faithful perceived the active presence of St. Simeon on his pillar, even upon his death and after the translation of his bodily relics to Antioch:

Adjoining the roof of the colonnades is a balustrade, termed by some persons windows, forming a fence towards both the before-mentioned court and the colonnades. At the balustrade, on the left of the pillar, I saw, in company with all the people who were there assembled, while the rustics were performing dances round it, a very large and brilliant star, shooting along the whole balustrade, not merely once, twice, or thrice, but repeatedly; vanishing, moreover, frequently, and again suddenly appearing: and this occurs only at the commemorations of the saint. There are also persons who affirm—and there is no reason to doubt the prodigy, considering the credibility of the vouchers, and the other circumstances which I actually witnessed—that they have seen a resemblance of the saint’s face flitting about here and there, with a long beard, and wearing a tiara, as was his habit.²⁵

Therefore, it was this focal, pivotal point and the vertical axis connecting the earthly with the heavenly, which the *tetrapyla* framed architecturally, that mattered the most for the design of the Church of St. Simeon Stylite. This highly sophisticated understanding of architectural design based on a *tetrapylon* module and the concept of merging horizontal, ceremonial axes along porticated streets at the vertical axis can be additionally supported by Libanius’s surviving fourth-century oration, including when he described the role of the *tetrapylon* in

racotta tiles covered the central core at some point, it would have still been a relatively heavy roof that collapsed after its construction.

25 *Evagrius Scholasticus*, *Historia ecclesiastica*, Book 1, chapter XIV.

urban design of Antioch: “From four arches which are joined to each other in the form of a rectangle, four pairs of stoas proceed as from an *omphalos*, stretched out toward each quarter of the heaven ...”²⁶

Church of St. John the Evangelist in Ephesus

The re-adaptation of the ancient concept of the *tetrapylon* in early Christian canopied church cores is noticeable in the well-known Church of St. John the Evangelist, in Ephesus, Turkey.²⁷ Initiated with the construction of a memorial in the fourth century, the structure was then replaced by a cruciform church built by the mid-fifth century with subsequent sixth-century additions and alternations, resulting in impressive structure with massive domes, which reached a span of 14 meters.²⁸ In each case, it seems as if the tomb of St. John the Evangelist was constantly the focus of the design, architecturally articulated by a massive domical core at the crossing (Figs. 8 and 9). In the center of the church crossing, a huge structural core marked by four thick L-shaped corner piers is consistent with the typical outline for civic *tetrapyla*. Within the core was a four-arched vaulted canopy substructure that sheltered the tomb of the apostle and saint. It remains unclear and unverifiable whether at first only the canopy existed and the later fifth-century church was built around the site with the *tetrapylon* core at its center, as was the case with the Church of St. Babylas, or whether the canopy over the tomb was a smaller replica the pre-existing *tetra-*

26 Downey, Libanius’ Oration, 652–686, citation on 674–675.

27 Krautheimer (with Ćurčić), Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture, 36, 106–107; Bogdanović, Framing, 248.

28 For those interested in attempts to date the building phases more precisely, see Karydis, Evolution, 97–128. Johnson, Byzantine Churches of Sardinia, 98–99, details the controversy among the archeologists such as Keil – Hörmann, Forschungen in Ephesos, 200ff, who argue for the fifth-century construction; Thiel, Johanneskirche in Ephesos, 100–103, who argues that the piers and vaults belong to the sixth-century Justinianic phase while some exterior walls are earlier; and Karydis, Early Byzantine Vaulted Construction, 11, 173–176 and Karydis, Evolution, 97–128, who recognizes the fifth-century cruciform church with the domed *tetrapylon*-like core enclosing the tomb of St. John, and later remodeled in the sixth century during at least two building phases.

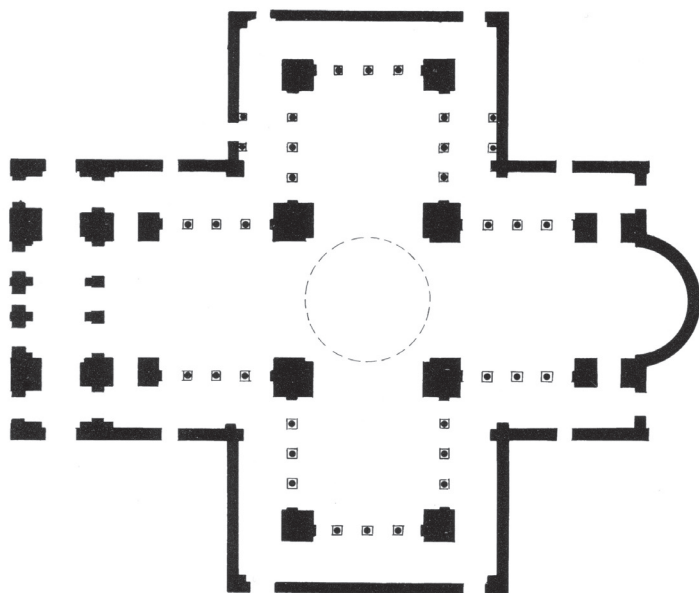


Figure 8. Church of St. John the Evangelist, in Ephesus, Turkey, as of ca. 520 (hypothetical reconstruction prepared by M. Johnson and based on archaeological and architectural analysis done by N. Karydis)

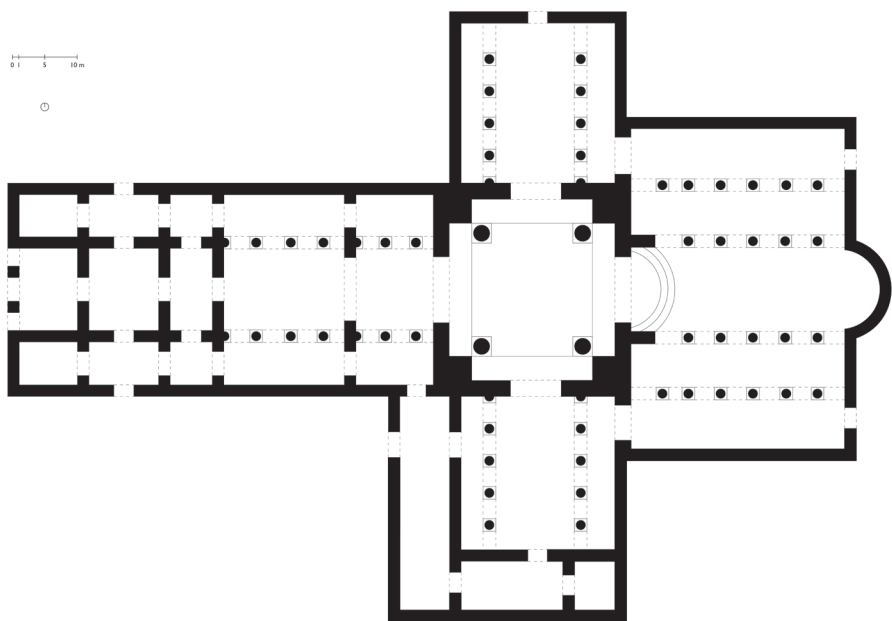


Figure 9. Church of St. John the Evangelist, in Ephesus, Turkey, built in ca. 450 and later

pylon at the crossing of the massive Church of St. John.²⁹ Regardless of the order of construction, the peculiar nesting of the two canopied structures inside each other confirms their overarching importance. The placement of the altar near the apse and behind the tomb in the Church of St. John, moreover, endorses the architectural and symbolic connections of the ancient *tetrapyla* with martyrs' tombs and altar canopies in the Christian East between the fourth and sixth centuries.

Church of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki

The redesign of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki provides another important example of the role of the *tetrapylon*-like core as a structural and symbolic unit of Byzantine structures. In its importance, size, and location within the urban texture, the cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki resembles its Constantinopolitan counterpart that set the standards for domed Byzantine churches.³⁰

It is certain that the site of the Church of Hagia Sophia was of greatest importance for the early Christians in Thessaloniki. Adam-Veleni has proposed that already in the fourth century, the church was built within or very close to the ancient "theater-stadium" that belonged to the Palace of Galerius.³¹ She even speculated that the church marked the place of one of the most important early Christian martyr-

29 Karydis convincingly discusses the cruciform church design of St. John in Ephesus, based on the central domical core enclosing the tomb at the center of the church, as recognized in several Early Christian martyria, including here discussed churches of St. Babylas and St. Simeon Stylites. Karydis also highlights the complexity of spatial design of St. John in Ephesus "due to the compartmentalization of the nave into bays, the juxtaposition of three and five-aisled parts, and the existence of corridors along the perimeter;" as well as the Justinian's additions and reconstruction of the church that included complete vaulting of the church with "domes, which reached a diameter of 14 m." *Karydis, Evolution*, 97–128, citations on 123 and 125.

30 *Mavropoulou-Tsioumi*, Hagia Sophia; *Theocharidou*, *Αρχιτεκτονική*; *Theocharidou*, *Architecture of Hagia Sophia*. On the church, including the analysis of its structure and design, see also, *Feist*, *Byzantinische*, 109–127.

31 *Adam-Veleni*, *Thessaloniki*, 157–159.

doms, that of Hagios Demetrios.³² Bauer and Feist further elucidated how the veneration of Hagios Demetrios established Thessaloniki as a major pilgrimage center, which over time also resulted in the desire to include the veneration of Hagios Demetrios not only in his eponymous church, but also in the Thessalonian cathedral.³³



Figure 10. Church of Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki, late 6th or early 7th century

The current Thessalonian church is the third in a series of structures built on the same site (fig. 10), all of which remain puzzling in terms of their architectural features.³⁴ During the intensive Christianization of Thessaloniki in the fifth century, the first, fourth-century church was replaced by a giant five-aisled basilica. This structure was

³² Ibid.

³³ *Bauer*, Stadt, 143–183; *Feist*, Byzantinische, 109–127, esp. 114.

³⁴ *Ćurčić*, Architecture in the Balkans, 61.

one of the largest early-Christian basilicas. It measured some 97 meters (more than 300 feet) in length and 53 meters (more than 170 feet) in width, covering an area of 0.5 hectares.³⁵ The sheer size of the basilica—less than 30 feet (approximately 10 meters) shorter than the impressive Old St. Peter's in Rome—suggests it was an imperial foundation of primary importance. Under un-clarified circumstances, but most like-

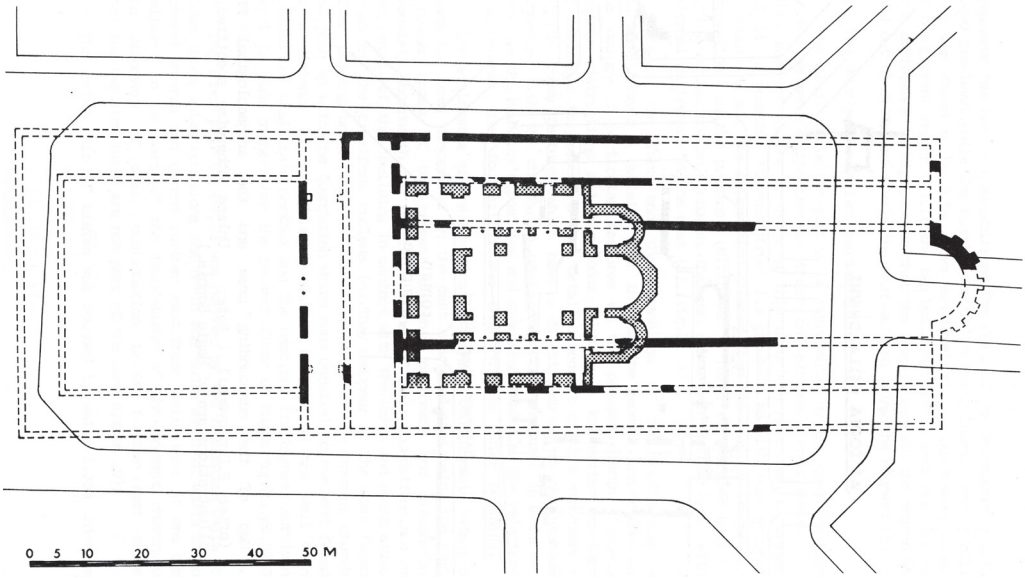


Figure 11. Reconstruction drawing of the early Christian basilica underneath Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki

ly even before the earthquakes of the 620s and 630s, the third, current cruciform church was built on the site of this five-aisled basilica.³⁶

Today, as the largest church in Thessaloniki, the cathedral of Hagia Sophia, measuring some 43 meters in length and 35 meters in

³⁵ Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 105; *Mentzos*, *Contribution*, 201–221, highlights the excavated measurements of this enormous building along with its atrium of some 122x53.05 meters.

³⁶ *Mentzos*, *Contribution*, 201–221; Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 258; *Mavropoulou-Tsioumi*, *Hagia Sophia*, 4–5. See also, *Kappas*, *Experimenting in Domed Constructions*, 95–125, esp. 100–101 for review of scholarship on the architecture of the Thessalonian Hagia Sophia.

width, must have also been one of the largest churches built during the economic and building decline experienced in the so-called transitional period of the seventh to ninth centuries (fig. 11).³⁷ Still, it is much smaller than its predecessor, occupying less than half of the original outline of the second basilica, and partially overlapping with the western section of the second basilica; it was constructed within its inner three aisles.³⁸ When building the new church, the architect followed the general outline of the western section of the second basilica. The western wall and the narthex of the older basilica were integrated into the construction of the new church. The foundation walls of the central nave and two side aisles set the general outline of the new building but were not included in the construction masonry, possibly to avoid a potential structural failure.

The re-use of fifth and sixth-century *spolia* in the construction of the current church confirm two important facts related to the architecture of Hagia Sophia. One is that the construction of the current church could have started by the late sixth or early seventh century, but certainly not earlier. The other highlights the use of *spolia*, mainly column capitals, with delicately carved wind-blown acanthus leaves. The quality of craftsmanship suggests that they may have come from previous churches in this very location and could have been used as palpable visual and architectural reminders of the “authenticity” of the church and its aura of old age and tradition, further highlighting the importance of the site itself.³⁹

The present Thessalonian cathedral of Hagia Sophia was built in at least two construction phases. The architect of this domed structure faced several critical issues when redesigning the church on the foundations of the previous basilica. The cathedral was dedicated to Holy Wisdom, an epithet for God, like its counterpart cathedral in Constantinople, which could have been its architectural model as well.⁴⁰ However, in Thessaloniki it seems as if the dome set on pendentives

37 See also, *Feist*, *Byzantinische*, 109–127.

38 *Ćurčić*, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 258.

39 See also, *Geymonat*, *Syntax*, 45–65, esp. 53–57.

40 *Mavropoulou-Tsioumi*, *Hagia Sophia*, 9.

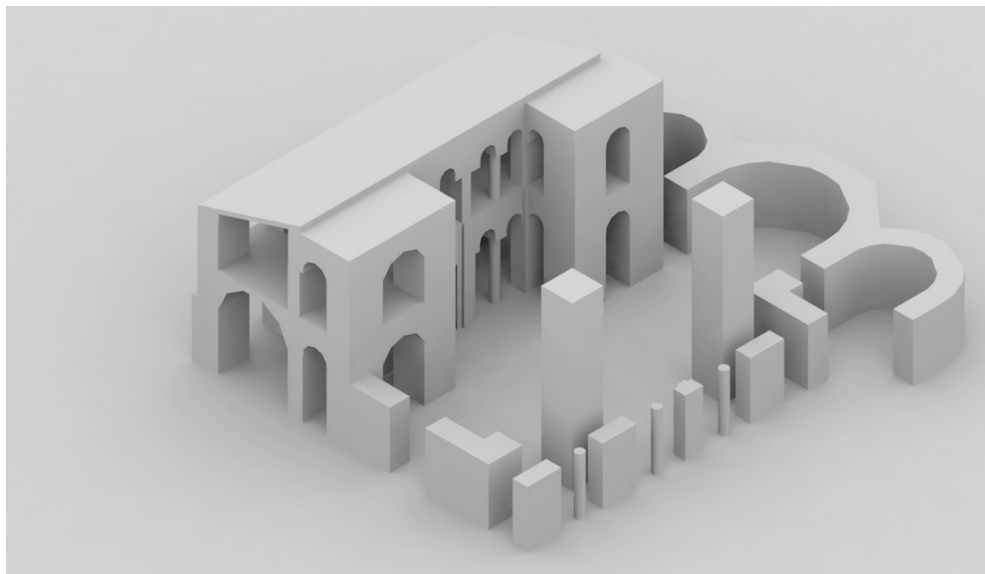


Figure 12. Three-dimensional model of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki showing the integration of the three-partite sanctuary in the three-aisled basilica

over the central space of the square-like basilica is the only direct structural reference to the Constantinopolitan church. The integration of the three-partite sanctuary within the outline of the three-aisled basilica resulted in a somewhat un-proportional eastern part of the building, which has significantly narrower spacing of the core than on the western side (fig. 12). The question of deep and dark galleries wrapping the core of the building has already been investigated on numerous occasions.⁴¹ Architecturally, the central part of the rebuilt Thessalonian church was articulated by a massive core, comprised of huge pier clusters that supported short barrel vaults, structurally and symbolically highlighting the large dome some 10 meters in span and rising over the central square bay of the church (fig. 13). This central and essential space, built during the first of at least two construction phases of the current church, can be architecturally defined as a massive *tetrapylon*.

The core of the Thessalonian Hagia Sophia includes all of the major structural and compositional features of an ancient *tetrapylon*. They have four massive piers connected by large arches or short barrel

⁴¹ See, for example, Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 258–260; Theodoridou, *Αρχιτεκτονική*, 53–85; Feist, *Byzantinische*, 117–120.

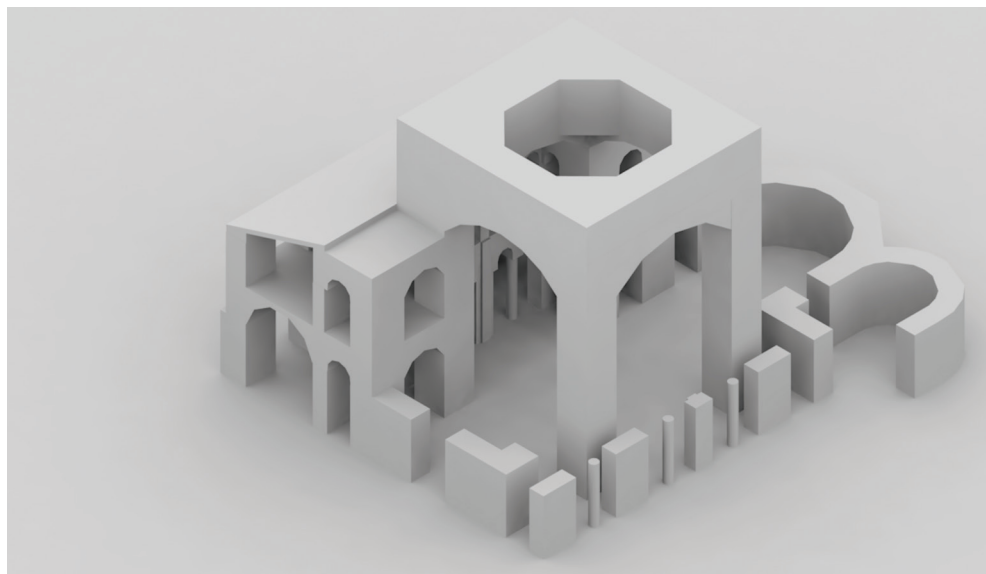


Figure 13. Three-dimensional model of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki showing the *tetrapylon* module imbedded in the church design

vaults, which in the Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki formed a cruciform structural system with the central domed *parti*. The middle zone of this *tetrapylon* comprised of a square-based masonry prism pierces the roof of the basilica; this middle zone of the structural module is here articulated by three windows on each side that allow light in shafts to penetrate the church interior and emphasize the notion of spatial and spiritual transcendence (fig. 14). On top of this transitional middle zone of the *tetrapylon* core rests a massive dome.⁴² In my opinion, the architect introduced a relatively short circular drum in order to extend the height of the dome, which otherwise would not have been visible in the exterior of the church due to the enormous size of the entire structure (fig. 15).⁴³ Similarly, the effect of the overarching dome can be observed in the interior. In contrast to the early Christian basilica

42 *Theocharidou*, *Architecture of Hagia Sophia*, 45; figs. 14–16, 19.

43 The articulation of the dome to be effectively included into a larger structure in terms of aesthetics and visibility from the exterior is a well-known problem in architecture. In the sixteenth century, for example, Michelangelo had the very same problem when redesigning St. Peter's in Rome, so he significantly elevated the central dome in order for it to be visible from the outside.



Figure 14. The prismatic middle zone of the tetrapylon core protruding through the roof of the church and supporting a shallow round drum of the dome; Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki, late 6th or early 7th century

that emphasizes almost exclusively a longitudinal axis and horizontal expanse, upon entering the Thessalonian Hagia Sophia, the visitor's gaze is drawn first horizontally towards the sanctuary apse but then gradually turns upwards towards the spacious and brightly lit dome, highlighting the critical role of the massive domed core and its verticality.⁴⁴ This effect was additionally reinforced by the design of the central core itself.

The key concepts for such architectural design on a massive scale always ultimately point to imperial concepts and Constantinople.⁴⁵ Indeed, the Constantinopolitan Hagia Sophia was the most inspiring

⁴⁴ *Mavropoulou-Tsioumi*, Hagia Sophia, 10. For the similar effect of Justinian's reconstruction of St. John in Ephesus see *Karydis*, *Evolution*, 97–128.

⁴⁵ *Kappas*, *Experimenting in Domed Constructions*, 95–125, esp. 113.

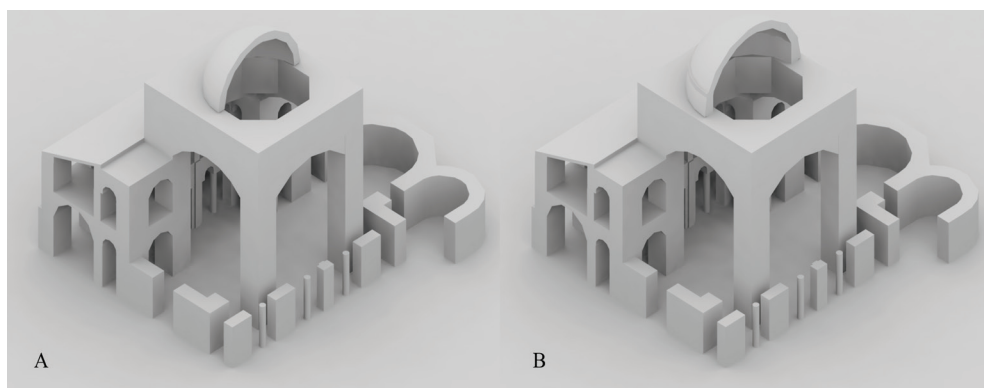


Figure 15. Three-dimensional model of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki showing the tetrapylon module with a dome imbedded in the church design: 15a) conceptually ideal design; 15b) improved design with the introduction of the shallow drum to raise the height of the dome

model for Thessalonian counterpart. Yet, the city of Thessaloniki, an old imperial city, in importance second only to Constantinople in the Byzantine Empire, was also rich in monumental architecture. In particular, it seems that the Arch of Galerius may have been an inspiring source for the re-design of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki. Architecturally, the clustered piers of the core of Thessalonian Hagia Sophia that expand from a simple four-piered structure, with the inclusion of lateral bays along west-east longitudinal axis, which is the prominent spatial axis in church design, structurally and compositionally resemble the still-standing Thessalonian Arch of Galerius. Built as a reminder of his victory over Persians in 297, the Arch was initially constructed as a simple *tetrapylon* with a blind dome.⁴⁶ Much like the later core of Hagia Sophia, the core of the Arch was some 10m in span. Shortly after its original construction, the Arch was enlarged with two lateral bays along the north-south axis and to the south was abutted by a massive prismatic structure, currently recognized as a kind of vestibule, thus making the entire Arch a prominent part of the originally palatial complex of Emperor Galerius, and making it fully integrated within

46 On the Arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki, its construction and integration within its larger spatial setting, see Čurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 20–1; Dey, *Afterlife*, 39; Torp, *Entrée*, 268–72.

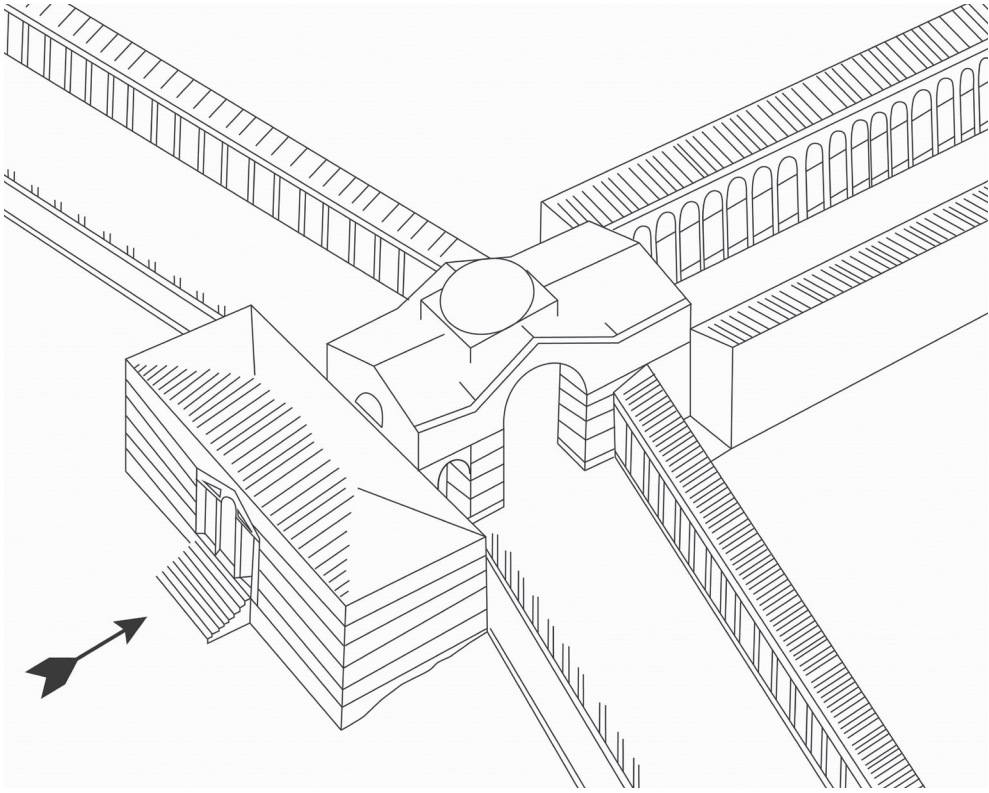


Figure 16. Reconstruction of the Arch of Galerius with the addition of the so-called vestibule to the south (after E. Dyggve), Thessaloniki, late 3rd and early 4th centuries

city topography (fig. 16).⁴⁷ The complex integrations of massive volumetric compounds clustered around the massive *tetrapylon*-like module of the two primary Thessalonian structures of the Arch of Galerius and Hagia Sophia point to refined and long-lasting understanding of related architectural concepts.

The well-trained architect of Hagia Sophia most likely also intended to evoke the long-standing honorific symbolism of *tetrapyla*, which were well known in Thessaloniki. The dedication of the previous two churches in the same location of Hagia Sophia remains hypothetical.⁴⁸ Adam-Veleni's suggestion that the original, first building on

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ It has been suggested that the original dedication of the church of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki was to the Apostle Mark. *Mavropoulou-Tsioumi*, Hagia Sophia, 5.



Figure 17. Interior of the dome with the mosaic showing the Ascension of Christ, Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki, 9th century

the site marked the martyrdom of Hagios Demetrios is unverifiable, but historical records about bishops' desire to introduce the veneration of Hagios Demetrios within the city cathedral are enlightening.⁴⁹ In light of my proposed reconstruction of the architectural outline of the current church, based on a massive composite four-piered structure inserted into the basilical plan, this *tetrapylon*-like core reopens the opportunity to reconsider the transposition of its associated symbolic meanings of presence and triumph, now in a Christian context. The central dome shows in the mosaics the triumphant image of Christ's Ascension, Christ being depicted in circular glory (fig. 17). Whether the mosaics are added later or are contemporaneous with the construc-

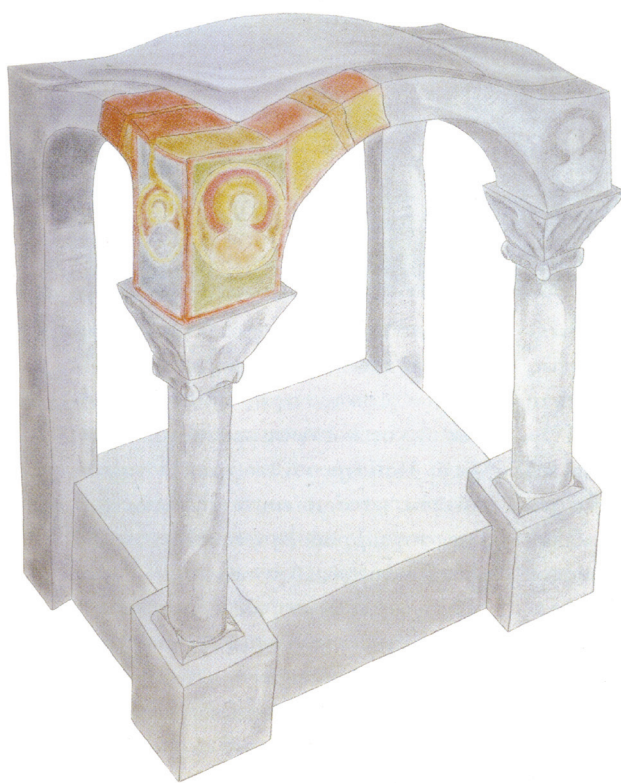


Figure 18. Diagrammatic drawing of the arcosolium canopied tomb from the southeast pier of the church core, Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki, 13th century

⁴⁹ *Adam-Veleni*, Thessaloniki, 157–159; *Bauer*, Stadt, 143–183; *Feist*, Byzantinsche, 109–127.

tion of the domical core cannot be answered at the moment as more research is needed. In any case, based on preserved inscription, the mosaics were installed by the ninth century.⁵⁰ The integration of the architecture of the dome and its monumental decoration underlines the vertical axis of the *tetrapylon* module and the symbolic meanings of the vertical movement from earthly to heavenly and the active presence of Christ, following His death on the Cross. In that context, the entire architectural and decorative design allowed for the transposing of the triumphal passage and victorious symbolism of imperial and civic *tetrapyla* into Christian belief in the Ascension of Christ and the ultimate triumph of life over death. The architectural concept and design of Thessalonian Hagia Sophia, therefore, reveal a sophisticated idea of the *tetrapylon* structurally and symbolically embedded in the basilica. Numerous tombs, dating from the late ninth century and later, set along the south aisle and narthex surrounding the structural and spatial core of the church, and above all the thirteenth-century *tetrapylon*-like tomb shrine embedded in the southeastern pier cluster (fig. 18),⁵¹ emphasize the architectural nesting of the four-columned objects within each other. Such architectural superposition of *tetrapyla*-like structures further promoted the interconnected concept of honorific Christian tombs and shrines with the symbolism of the core of the domed Byzantine churches, glorifying the promise of eternal life in Christ, the central Christian idea.

The adaptive re-use of civic *tetrapyla* in Constantinople

Though now lost without tangible archaeological evidence, Constantinopolitan *tetrapyla* certainly were a key part of the pan-Mediterranean phenomenon of their use and possibly resembled in form and function architecturally better-known *tetrapyla* from the wider

⁵⁰ Feist, *Byzantinische*, 109–127, esp. 125.

⁵¹ *Mavropoulou-Tsioumi*, Hagia Sophia, 7; Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 297–300, 383–387; *Kissas*, *Sepulchral Monument*, 36–49, figs. 2–4; *Theocharidou*, *Αρχιτεκτονική*, 52–57.

region.⁵² As Mango has demonstrated, the imperial ceremonial processions in Constantinople followed the Mese, the two-prong porticated main city avenue, which connected the so-called Golden and Chalke (Bronze) Gates at the main entrances to the city and the Great Palace respectively.⁵³ The imperial processions were physically articulated by dominant stations marked by immense *tetrapyla*, so that Byzantine emperors passed through these triumphal structures during various ceremonies. On the Mese, there were at least three *tetrapyla*: the domed *tetrapylon* over the Million at the Augustaion square, in the proximity of the Hagia Sophia and the Great Palace;⁵⁴ the *tetrapylon* near Sigma square, also known as the Golden Tetrapylon;⁵⁵ and the so-called Bronze Tetrapylon (Chalkoun Tetrapylon), between the *fora* of Constantine and Theodosius.⁵⁶ These monuments could have been redesigned and adaptably reused within church architecture, confirming the practice of their transposition inclusive of their triumphal meanings within a Christian context.

Magdalino read closely several Byzantine texts that described the rebuilding and the conversion of the domed *tetrapylon*, perhaps the Golden Tetrapylon itself, into the now lost Constantinopolitan Church of Christ Antiphonetes (the Guarantor) during the seventh century.⁵⁷ He demonstrated that the Church of Christ Antiphonetes

52 The analysis of Constantinopolitan *tetrapyla* here derives mainly from *Bogdanović*, Framing, 249–250. See also, *Thiel*, Tetrakionia, 299–326; *Milojević*, Forming and Transforming, 247–262; *Bogdanović*, Tetrapylon.

53 *Mango*, Triumphal Way, 173–188, demonstrates that the imperial processions were envisioned as part of the civic program already during the foundation of Constantinople, fully established at least by the fifth century and followed at least until the Middle Byzantine times. See also, *McCormick*, Eternal Victory, 189–230.

54 *Müller-Wiener*, Bildlexikon, 216–218.

55 *Notitia Dignitatum* (ed. *O. Seeck*), 243.

56 On the Chalkoun Tetrapylon, see, *Mango*, Développement, 30–32; *Magdalino*, Constantinople médiévale, 21–25; *Berger*, Streets, 161–172. There are also suggestions that the Tetrapylon stood between the forum of Theodosius (ancient Forum Tauri) and the Philadelphion. *Janin*, Constantinople byzantine, 101, 104, 208, 210, 328–329.

57 *Magdalino*, Some Lost. I thank Magdalino for allowing me to cite his work before its publication.

was built around a domed *tetrapylon*, which originally stood next to the Temple of the Tyche at the north-eastern corner of the Basilica cistern in a close proximity to Hagia Sophia. Based on texts, during the construction of the Church of Christ Antiphonetes, the *tetrapylon* articulated the conception of the church and its central four-columned domed core, and most likely endowed it with its culturally recognized imperial and triumphal meanings.⁵⁸

As it did in other parts of the wider Mediterranean region, the original concept of a *tetrapylon* as a civic and victory monument survived in Constantinople in various forms. As cited in the tenth-century *Synaxarion* of Constantinople and mentioned by a Castilian traveler and ambassador Clavijo in the early fifteenth century, the Bronze Tetrapylon acquired relics of the forty martyrs of Sebaste.⁵⁹ As a public monument in medieval Constantinople, this *tetrapylon*, enriched with the holy relics, thus proclaimed Christian salvific messages, effectively combined with the long-lasting honorific civic and sacred connotations. The adaptive re-use of civic *tetrapyla* in Constantinople confirms that the transposition of these objects into structural and symbolic architectural *parti* of Byzantine churches and religious structures was not only a wide and significant architectural phenomenon but also central for various experimentations in search for monumental domed design.

*

Conclusion

Cecilia Olovdotter has already elucidated how starting in the fourth century, abstract concepts in late antique Mediterranean art were successfully conveyed through architectural forms and motifs, which recurrently derived from actual architectural accomplishments.⁶⁰ She particularly highlights “the regularizing principles of architecture – containment, axiality, symmetry, elevation, stratification – ... for visualizing cosmic wholeness and order, and the spheres within

⁵⁸ See also, *Bogdanović*, Framing, 249.

⁵⁹ *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* (ed. *Delehaye*), 356, 524; *Janin*, Géographie, 485–486.

⁶⁰ *Olovdotter*, Architecture and the Spheres of the Universe, 137–177.

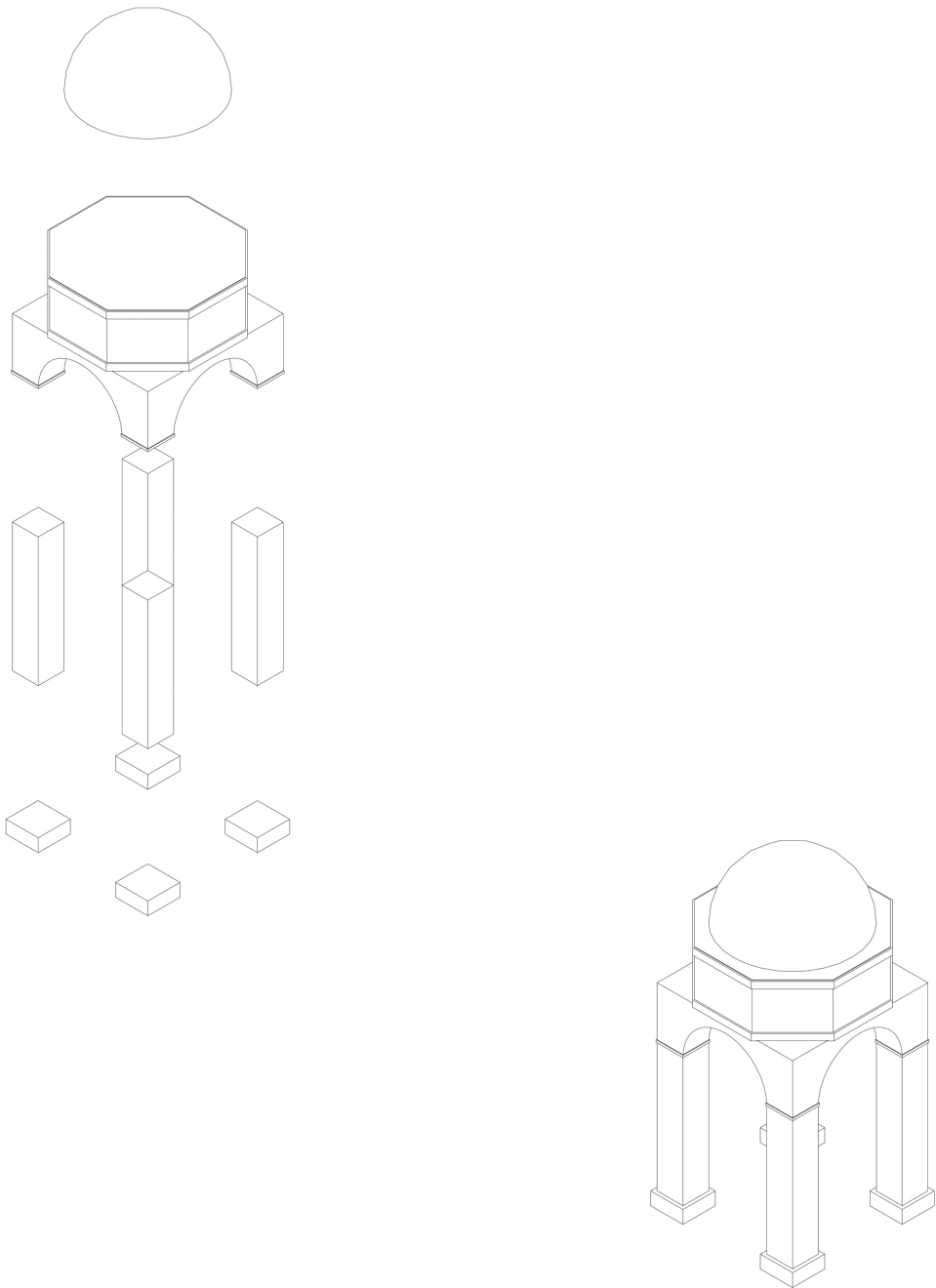


Figure 19. Diagrammatic drawing showing the transformation of the middle zone of ancient *tetrapyla* into an octagonal drum for the church dome of the Middle Byzantine churches

that order,” including the physical creation of such structured spaces in architecture, both built and imagined.⁶¹ In this paper, the analysis of the architectural process of transposition—i.e. the re-arrangement, re-ordering, or reversing the place of *tetrapyla* within the core of Byzantine churches—while at the same time trans-posing—i.e. exchanging their symbolic meanings—further points to the significant and continuous role of built architecture as a communication tool within wider chronological and cultural contexts of the Balkans and eastern Mediterranean. Such a complex transposition additionally points to one of the ways in which Byzantine churches were eventually standardized as buildings with a core typically comprised of a four-columned structure with a dome.

As a module, the *tetrapylon* often included related formal arrangements, measurements and proportions, which allowed architects to engage within dynamic, modular and diagrammatic systems of architectural design and provide different spatial and structural solutions on different scales. The *tetrapylon* could have remained a freestanding structure enriched with Christian meanings, as was most likely the case with the Bronze Tetrapylon in Constantinople. It could have been re-used as the central core of the newly designed church, as was most likely the case with the domed Golden Tetrapylon incorporated within the now-lost Constantinopolitan Church of Christ Antiphonetes or with the archaeologically-confirmed cruciform Kaoussié Church of St. Babylas, and possibly the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Ephesus. It could have been inverted into “dematerialized” void, as in the case of the Church of St. Simeon Stylites the Elder. Finally, it could have been re-invented as a structural and symbolic design module, as in the redesigned basilica of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki.

The obvious design issues of articulating the domed *tetrapylon* structural module into the basilical, preexisting substructure of the Church of Hagia Sophia, where the shallow prismatic middle zone was pierced by three windows on each of the four sides, in my opinion, further led to the improvement of a design approach based on four-columned domed canopy as a module in later Byzantine churches.

61 Ibid., citation on 161.

Based on the limited evidence we have, the massive *tetrapylon*-like core set on enormous clustered piers and framing the most important locale on the site, was originally palpably associated with the saintly presence either through frequently used tomb-shrine(s), as demonstrated here by showcasing a few representative selected examples, or a memorial column, as in the case of the Church of St. Simeon Stylites the Elder. Eventually, the gigantic, monumental *tetrapylon* was gradually abandoned as a design concept, most likely after the seventh century, and by the ninth century, based on the evidence from the Church of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki.



Figure 20. Domes of the Church of Panagia Chalkeon, Thessaloniki, 1028

Yet, the perseverance of the smaller-scale canopy-like core on four columns in later, Middle Byzantine solutions reflects the role of *tetrapylon parti* as a design idea and effective communication tool invested with cosmic and triumphant symbolism. Monumentality remained

present not through imposing scale and size, but as an aesthetic value in architecture that evokes spirituality. In the process, the prismatic middle zone of the structural module of the central four-columned core of the Byzantine church was improved architecturally by being proportionally elongated and chamfered at the corners to provide for an octagonal drum pierced by windows and supporting the dome, which in turn also became more visible from the exterior. This solution can be exemplified by the domes of the Middle Byzantine Church of the Mother of God Chalkeon in Thessaloniki (Figs. 19 and 20, see also fig. 3). In such an erudite design concept, the symbolic meanings of the honorific imperial *tetrapyla* are also effectively trans-positioned from initially civic structures into the honorific victorious symbolism of the church itself, understood both as a building and a church community. It is suggested here that the interiority⁶² of *tetrapyla*, preconditioned by the long-lasting cultural perception of these edifices as singular places for the meeting of the heavenly and earthly, also provided a palpable sense of place for the intellectual and emotional encounter with the divine in the Byzantine ecclesiastical context.

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62 Interiority is here understood as the experience of being and presence in place.

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О ТРАНСПОЗИЦИЈИ ТЕТРАПИЛОНА У СТРУКТУРНА И СИМБОЛИЧКА ЈЕЗГРА ВИЗАНТИЈСКИХ ЦРКАВА

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